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SUBJECT: Comoros Plans To Hold Legislative Elections in July

REF: ANTAN 357

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: While still implementing new constitutional provisions, President Sambi intends to hold legislative elections before Ramadan begins in late August and has asked donors for financing and technical assistance. Hundreds of candidates will likely contest the more than 70 positions at the National Assembly and three island "parliaments." Once elected, these legislators are expected, pursuant to the new constitution, to decide on the date for the next Union Presidential election. END SUMMARY.

GOC Implements New Constitution

¶2. (SBU) The GOC has established a committee of jurists and other experts to implement the sweeping changes in institutions and authorities embodied in the May 17 constitutional referendum (REFTEL). Briefing the diplomatic community, Chief of Cabinet Dossar and Minister of Justice Mmadi insisted governance would improve and President Sambi would be more able to achieve his development objectives.

¶3. (SBU) Comoros Officer again encouraged reconciliation and dialogue, commending President Sambi for his ongoing talks with all three island executives. Replying to African Union S/E Madeira's talking point about "consensus" (the exact word Tanzanian President Kikwete used in speeches while visiting the Comoros), Dossar said consensus is neither desirable nor feasible. "We are in the majority, we are elected, the referendum passed, and we have to govern," Dossar declared. He accepted that reconciliation and dialogue were valid issues in the Comoros and said the Union Government would continue along these lines; but he flatly rejected the notion that the Comoros could be ruled by consensus.

Legislative Elections

¶4. (SBU) Currently, no legislative branch exists in the Comoros; a "void" that President Sambi acknowledges as serious. He told the dip corps he intends to hold legislative elections - for the National Assembly Deputies and the island parliament "counselors" before Ramadan begins (about August 20). Such a deadline requires electoral list revisions, registering candidates, producing ballots, and organizing logistics in the next six weeks in order to hold the first round end July then the second round three weeks later. No official decree announcing the date for the legislative election has been issued. Our French, UN, EU, and AU colleagues expect to respond favorably to the request for financial and technical assistance, but must have detailed budgets and timelines, as well as adequate notice, to mobilize resources. AU Ambassador Mourad told Comoros Officer that a high-level AU Peace and Security delegation would visit the Comoros in June. South African Ambassador Mabeta made clear in a recent meeting that his country had no intention of contributing anything near the scale of the major military/logistics deployment for the AU-organized presidential election in 2006.

¶5. (SBU) Already many dozens of political leaders have expressed their intention to run for one of the 70 National Assembly or island

parliament positions. These elected officials will then meet in Congress, as per the recent referendum, to decide on the date for the next Union Presidential election. The new constitution is subject to multiple interpretations, but the Congress seems to have the authority to select any date as long as the Union President and island governors are elected the same day; thereafter all four have five year terms. The political compromise still required is to "harmonize" mandates that currently end in 2010 (Sambi), 2012 (Abdouwahabi and Ali Said) and 2013 (Toybou). Vice President Idi Nadhoim told Comoros Officer he is advocating for early 2012 for the next Presidential election; giving Sambi two additional years beyond his legal mandate and allowing opposition governors Abdouwahabi and Ali Said to complete their terms of office. For Anjouan's pro-Sambi governor Toybou, "we'll give him a big check and if he gets reelected, he does not lose anything." Vice President Idi agreed with Comoros Officer's assertion that Sambi has the constitution he wants, "now we have to deliver, but we have no money."

Mohelians Say Fomboni Accords "Dead"

16. (SBU) Moheli Governor Ali Said and his colleagues insist the May 17 referendum was illegitimate but accept they are powerless to do anything about it. He told AU S/E Madeira the 2001 Fomboni Accords - which ended a secession crisis and established the rotating presidency - were "dead" because Moheli would not get its rightful turn in 2010. Noting both the AU and La Francophonie were signatories to Fomboni, Ali Said insisted they should be "guarantors of its provisions." S/E Madeira insisted the rotation would be respected and Moheli would get his turn. However, when voices around the room cried "when?" he was silent.

ANTANANARI 00000446 002 OF 002

17. (SBU) Both Moheli's Ali Said and Grande Comore's Abdouwahabi continue to issue joint declarations, most recently following their May 22 meeting with President Sambi. Privately Abdouwahabi has split with his Mohelian opposition counterpart, accepting the referendum, worried about the authority (and money) he is losing, and focusing on gaining an opposition majority at the legislative elections. Ali Said is under intense pressure from political leaders in Moheli to defend the tiny island's promised turn in the rotating presidency. However, Ali Said monopolizes most of Moheli's economy and is comfortable in his position as governor even with diminished authority. Former Prime Minister Bolero, an opposition leader not currently in office, told Comoros Officer that Ali Said has neither the leverage nor the courage to risk his current position to really challenge President Sambi.

COMMENT:

18. (SBU) While the GOC and diplomats seem to agree that the legislative elections require donor financing, some political and business contacts are not so sure. They note the USD 24 million pledged by the Arab League and allege support from Kuwait-based "Comoro Gulf Holdings" and even Iran that would allow President Sambi to hold the elections in July without the help of traditional donors. The quality and legitimacy of these important legislative elections will depend on how much time is available to plan and how deeply the AU, EU, French, and UN will be involved in its organization. Questions that depend on them include: who will hold Comoros' future stability in their hands when they meet in "Congress" to decide; ultimately, how long Sambi stays in power; and how much longer Moheli has to wait? END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT